UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.6/1994/NGO/8
4 March 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Thirty-eighth session
New York, 7-18 March 1994
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: ACTION FOR EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Statement submitted by International Women's Anthropology Conference, Inc., (IWAC) a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The International Women's Anthropology Conference (IWAC) is an international network of women in anthropology and related fields whose research and activities centre on issues of concern to women. As social scientists we seek to understand gender and the diverse forms gender relations take across society and culture. By looking at gender from a comparative and historical perspective, we can begin to explain and appreciate the diversity of gender relations and structure and, in turn, affect the role and status of women. Our perspective is rooted in respect for the basic humanity of all peoples and a search for understanding through systematic and contextual inquiry of the reality of peoples' lives as experienced by them. The goals of IWAC are to exchange information on current research, projects, sources of funding and publications of interest, to promote activities directed towards developing a cross-cultural, comparative framework for work being done on and with women; and to bring anthropological perspectives to bear on national and international policies concerning women.

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* E/CN.6/1994/1.

As the Commission on the Status of Women prepares for the Fourth World Conference on Women and develops a draft Platform for Action, IWAC would draw the Commission's attention to the following critical areas of concern and strategic objectives and actions to be taken.

All policies and programmes of action should take into account the ways in which particular structures of inequality such as race, caste, and ethnicity differentially have an impact on women. They should be equity-driven to ensure that all women have equal access to resources and opportunities in their particular localities and that compensatory measures are initiated to make up for historical or traditional discrimination.

1. Strategic objectives related to economic structures

In the context of the world-wide changes that have occurred during the past few years, including the new trends in development, the increases in mechanization as a result of technological advances and the focus of the global capitalist system on privatization, it is clear that the vast majority of women living in the countries of the South and the poor in those of the North have become more vulnerable. Many have lost their jobs, have only part-time work or are forced to work for substandard wages and/or to emigrate.

Under these circumstances, it is extremely important that the following be taken into account in a culturally sensitive manner:

International labour laws should be revised to take into account a gender perspective in the context of the globalization of economies. With the many free trade negotiations under way, it is imperative that minimum international labour standards be developed to protect workers in both developed and developing countries.

Regulations as well as laws and monitoring instruments should be developed at the local, national and international levels to eliminate income inequalities between women and men in the workplace. Care should be exercised to see to it that this is not used as an excuse to eliminate female employment. Equal rights commissions at the level of workplaces should be encouraged.

Studies on the ramifications of new techniques of labour-organizing, such as flexible work hours, should be encouraged by international and national agencies, universities, non-governmental organizations and unions.

A gender perspective should be taken into account in government regulation and monitoring of health and safety in the workplace. Care should be taken that this is not used as an excuse for not hiring women, since it is clear that male workers should also not be exposed to such hazards as poisonous chemicals and radioactivity.

Governments, non-governmental organizations and local groups should be encouraged, in a culturally sensitive manner, to address issues of equality for women within the home. Campaigns encouraging men and the State to share in domestic responsibilities should respect cultural values.

Cultural values should not, however, be used as an excuse to justify a double or triple burden on working women.

Recognizing that there is a need for more knowledge and technology transfer to rural women, culturally sensitive dialogue should be promoted between women at the grass-roots level and development researchers, trainers and policy makers. This technical training should be given according to the ecological needs of the region.

International agencies should help to build up effective information networks among women engaged in similar activities, such as wasteland development, rice cultivation and horticulture, in different parts of the same country and between countries.

International agencies, national and local governments and organizations should be encouraged to help rural women with the marketing of cash crops, crafts and forest, horticultural and processed products.

At least a small piece of family land should be either put in the name of the wife or jointly in the name of the husband and wife. Discriminatory legal clauses and customary laws and traditions that affect women's equal rights to land and other natural resources in rural areas need to be removed. As a start, by the year 2000, it is suggested that at least 25 per cent of rural women have at least a small parcel of land in their own name.

2. Strategic objectives related to migrant women

The increasing number of international migrants has become a major feature of the world today. Today's migration results from the failure of most development models and economic structures to provide basic employment and subsistence. A striking feature of this migration is the growth in female migrant workers. Rising xenophobia and racism, exacerbated by the traumas of recession and unemployment, mark migrants and other foreigners as targets of hostilities. Moreover, the migrant woman is most susceptible to abuse and the denial of basic human rights as she is relatively isolated from the benefits of rights acquired through collective bargaining and is unprotected from violations of her person.

In response to these conditions, measures leading to the empowerment of migrant women must include:

De-emphasis of export-oriented development policies which accelerate migration and neglect internal needs of developing countries.

Access of women to such resources as land, credit and training programmes.

Encouragement of Governments to examine implicit and explicit migration policies which may violate human rights and view migrant women and men as a source of foreign exchange.

Examination of the role of imported mass media and cultural models in accelerating migration, and the support of policies favouring a new information order.

Adoption and ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which covers, inter alia, documented and undocumented workers, women and men as migrant workers, and many important social, economic, human rights and cultural questions concerning migrants and their families. In addition:

The United Nations system should provide all facilities and assistance necessary to promote the Convention, including a briefing paper on it.

Non-governmental organizations should publicize and promote the Convention, organize public forums to discuss its importance, advocate for its signature ratification and application.

General Assembly resolution 48/110 on violence against women migrant workers should be implemented.

The only effective means of reducing migratory pressures is economic development that creates full and productive employment in a politically stable environment. Job creation, using local labour, local resources, and local capacities in areas of extreme migratory pressure, should be promoted.

3. Strategic objectives related to militarism

Paradoxically, as the cold war comes to an end, the increasing militarization which has characterized the world since the Second World War continues to severely jeopardize the situation of women. Today military values, ideology and patterns of behaviour dominate the political, social and economic affairs of States, as well as their external relations.

This world view, which puts a low price on human life, has had a particularly deleterious impact on women. Violence, in the name of "national security", has become the daily reality for many women, keeping them hungry, impoverished and in constant fear of organized rape; they fear for their own survival and that of their families. This emphasis on violence as a solution to the world's problems penetrates the day-to-day experience of women. No longer are just the military armed but civilians as well. Many women are forced to migrate, while those who are left behind are the sole caretakers of large numbers of dependents. Militarism has also made women the objects of sexual abuse on military bases and in the sex tourism industry. Under these conditions women are unable to organize; they are kept in a perpetual state of poverty. These conditions are immoral and counter to the basic human and societal interests of all women, men and children.

Measures leading towards demilitarization should include:

The creation of gender-balanced civilian commissions that would open to public scrutiny all military activities, expenditures and research and development.

The immediate restructuring of government budgets to include a reduction in military spending. Monies saved should be allocated to education and social services.

4. Strategic objectives related to linking research and action

Research should challenge paradigms and theoretical frameworks which:

Ignore structural racism and how it is produced and reproduced within the economic, political and cultural structures of societies, as well as policies and practices which perpetuate racism.

"Blame the victim" instead of challenging and transforming processes in society which underpin the subordination of women.

Do not speak to and give voice to the experiences of the researched.

Research should analyse and document the conditions and life experiences of women, utilizing a feminist political economy approach.

Research should be for political and social change and directed towards women's self-determination.